

CHICAGO WINTER BIRDS

BY

COLIN C. SANBORN

Assistant, Division of Birds



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WINTER BIRDS ON LAKE MICHIGAN.
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Chicago Winter Birds

In the chill days of fall, when the trees begin to drop their leaves, most of the birds that have made this region their summer home, depart for a warmer climate where food is more plentiful. Some, however, find sufficient food here in winter, so remain as residents throughout the year. Others, used to a more rigorous climate, are easily able to withstand our winters, and come down from the north to remain until spring. Still another group is found here only in severe winters when weather conditions farther north interfere with the food supply or when the supply itself is limited, and they are driven into this region in their search for subsistence.

Weather conditions and the character of the vegetation in the vicinity of Chicago are favorable for a variety of birds to spend the winter. The Lake, rarely freezing, provides open water for a number of species of ducks, which subsist mainly on fish at this time of year, and also for the gulls, which are more scavengers than fish eaters. In the city parks are many trees and shrubs whose fruit supplies certain species with food. In the suburbs, many people maintain feeding shelves, supplied with suet, nut meats, and other attractive food for birds. As the snow is seldom deep enough to cover all the dried stalks of golden rod, ragweed and other seed-bearing plants, which are plentiful along ditches and field borders, the different sparrows are well provided for. Mice, which are preyed upon by

the hawks and owls, are always abundant in the fields and woods. In the Dune region of northern Indiana, where deep hollows afford the birds protection from the wind and snow, there is a great supply of poison sumach, flowering dogwood, bittersweet and other like fruits, as well as many conifers attractive to Crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks.

With such favorable conditions, then, it is not to be wondered that there are about sixty species of birds that may be found in the vicinity of Chicago during the winter. Let it not be supposed, however, that all sixty can be found every day or even every winter. Birds are not so abundant in winter as at other seasons, and each species stays in the locality best suited to its requirements, so they are often widely separated. Certain species are of a restless nature, and while found in one place today, may be miles away by tomorrow. Moreover, the severity of the winter, affecting their movements, keeps certain species here during mild years and drives others down from the north during cold years.

This paper will take up the different types of country about Chicago, and briefly discuss the species likely to be found in them. Lake Michigan and the ducks found there will first be considered. The best time to observe ducks is when a west wind has blown the loose ice out, leaving a waterway between it and the solid ice masses which extend out from the shore. In this open water, the ducks feed and often come close to the ice for protection from the wind, so that a person hidden in a hollow near the edge of the water has an excellent opportunity to make close observations. There are four ducks that are common in winter, the American Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Old Squaw and Golden-eye. They arrive in October and November and leave the last of March or early in

April. The Red-breasted Merganser sometimes stays until late in May. Another species, the Barrow's Golden-eye, closely resembles our common Golden-eye, but is very rarely found here. Only the adult males can be distinguished from the common species, unless in the hand, so many may pass unnoticed. The Harlequin Duck has been reported during the last few years, but is of very rare occurrence. Three scoters, the American, White-winged, and Surf Scoter, have been found at times, but as they generally stay some distance out in the lake they are seldom reported. The only geese still common here are the Canada Geese, and most of these are seen on the wing as they fly between the lake and the cornfields, where they go to feed in the early morning and late evening. They arrive about the middle of October and some flocks stay all winter, leaving in April. The Herring Gull and the Ring-billed Gull are always plentiful along the lake and in the rivers. The former is the larger bird, but it is hard to distinguish the different species except when seen together. They are great scavengers, and where any refuse is being dumped, large flocks will gather. The smallest of our gulls, the Bonaparte's, appears in August and stays until November, some occasionally remaining all winter.

Along the beach in the early part of the winter, until the last of December, Snow Buntings are fairly common. They arrive the last of October and may stay until the first of March, although rarely found after December. Prairie Horned Larks are sometimes found with them. On the more open prairies or in sparsely settled areas, a few Prairie Chickens are making a last stand. They were formerly common in this region, but the cultivation of the fields and shooting have driven them out. A few years ago, a farmer found two nests while plowing and thoughtfully left

a large patch of grass about each one, with the result that all the eggs hatched safely. If everyone would be so considerate, there might be more chickens. Two game birds that have been introduced with marked success are the Pheasant and Hungarian Partridge. They are found in open and brushy fields, and are said to be increasing very encouragingly.

As the hawks and owls prey upon mice in winter, it is about the more open country that they are most common, such as fields and marshes. The Marsh Hawk, a common resident, often winters here, and when on the wing is easily identified by the conspicuous white patch on the rump. The American Rough-legged Hawk appears in October and November and stays about in small numbers until early March. It is a heavy, slow-flying hawk, and often hunts in the early evening after the sun has set. During particularly hard winters, large numbers of Goshawks are apt to appear from the north. They destroy much game and poultry and in consequence many are shot. One Chicago taxidermist received fifteen for mounting during a recent visit of these birds. Snowy Owls also come with the Goshawks, but are less frequent. It is hard to say in what particular locality they are most likely to be found. The last one seen in this region was found in Grant Park near the Museum, by H. L. Stoddard, in November, 1919. The most common owl is the Short-eared, especially during its migration in late October and early November. This bird tries to escape notice by sitting quietly in the grass or cat-tails, and only flies when nearly stepped on.

A very beneficial little bird, catching many mice and also English Sparrows, is the Screech Owl. It is seldom seen, however, for during the day it sleeps in some hollow tree or old woodpecker's nest, only coming out to hunt after the sun has set. It even comes into

the city, where its presence is seldom suspected unless its quavering call is heard. The Sparrow Hawk, a common summer resident, stays about in small numbers during mild winters. During 1921 and 1922, especially, many were reported. Mice and small birds are sometimes found impaled on the thorns of the haw, wild crab and other trees. This is the work of the Northern Shrike or Butcherbird, as it is popularly called, which appears in small numbers in October and stays about until March.

In mild years, a few Meadowlarks usually remain, staying in one locality all winter, about certain favorite fields. The Prairie Horned Lark is a common resident, frequenting open fields and prairies, as its name suggests. It is always very plentiful on golf courses. It nests very early, sometimes in March when snow is still on the ground. In the brushy fields, open woods and along the roads, the Tree Sparrow is always present. It arrives about the middle of October and leaves about the first of May. The Slate-colored Junco, often found with it, arrives in September and spends the winter in small numbers, leaving in April. As the food of these two sparrows consists chiefly of noxious weed seeds, they are very beneficial to agriculture. Three other finches with similar local preferences are the Goldfinch, Redpoll and Pine Siskin, the latter preferring the pine woods. The Goldfinch is a common resident and the Redpoll and Pine Siskin come down from the north in October and stay until April, the Siskins staying, sometimes, until May. The Redpoll is more common and is here every year, while the Siskin is rare in some years. The Holboell's and Hoary Redpolls have been taken here, but are very rare. Two other sparrows, occasionally found in winter, are the Song Sparrow, a summer resident, and the Fox Sparrow, a common migrant. The Song Sparrow has been

noted in ditches and in cat-tails in a marsh in January and February. In mild winters, Fox Sparrows stay about brushy woods and fields. Mr. W. I. Lyon of Waukegan had one about his feeding station from November to late March, the winter of 1921-22.

In woods and along their borders and in orchards, the Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers feed on the larvae of destructive insects and wood-boring beetles, thus greatly helping the farmer in keeping these pests under control. Another resident, the Chickadee, more common in winter, is often found with the Downy. It is a bright, active little bird, very tame and inquisitive, often coming within a few feet of a person. The Hudsonian Chickadee, from the north, is a very rare winter visitant, and there are but few records of its capture here, the last being in 1906. The Brown Creeper, a migrant arriving late in September, frequently remains all winter, leaving the first part of May. It works its way to the top of one tree and then flying to the bottom of another, repeats the performance. The White-breasted Nuthatch is a fairly common winter resident and a rare breeder in this area, and the Red-breasted is, in some years, a common migrant from September to November, when a few will winter. The latter bird is partial to pine trees and sometimes the pines at Beach, Illinois, are fairly alive with them during a heavy migration. Later, they may be seen there in December and January.

As mentioned before, the Dune region in northern Indiana is especially attractive to winter birds, and the following, while also found in other sections, are most common in the Dunes. Two game birds are holding their own fairly well, the Bob-white and Ruffed Grouse. There are four or five coveys of Bob-white about the Dunes which, with protection, ought to increase. A few coveys also may be found southwest of

the city. The Ruffed Grouse is fairly plentiful in the Dunes. It breeds there and appears to be slowly increasing. Since the heavy timber has been cut and the country become more settled, the Great Horned Owl has almost disappeared, but a few, perhaps a dozen pairs, still linger in this region. They breed very early, in late February or early March. Some may still be found in the heavy timber along the Des Plaines River. The Long-eared Owl also appears in small numbers in the Dunes and a few breed there. It is generally found in pine trees. The smallest owl found here, the Saw-whet, was formerly not an uncommon resident, but appears now mostly as a winter visitant, at times fairly common in the Dunes. In years when the acorn crop is especially large, the Red-headed Woodpeckers remain through the winter. They are very plentiful in the Dunes and have been found storing acorns in cracks in trees and under the bark. The Northern Flicker, a common summer resident, winters in the Dunes in small numbers nearly every year. Prior to the fall of 1920, there were but four records of the Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker for the Chicago area. During that fall, however, there was an invasion of these birds from the north, and some sixteen were reported, including a number from the Dune region where they were found well into December. In the pines in deep hollows in the Dunes, Golden-crowned Kinglets generally may be found. Kinglets are common migrants, arriving the last of September, and a few spend the winter, leaving in April. They are usually found in thick pines in winter. A southern bird that is gradually extending its range northward is the Tufted Titmouse. It is now fairly common south and west of the city, but few have been seen north. It probably breeds in the Dune region. The Cardinal is another southern bird

that has become fairly common in the past ten years, until now nearly every town about Chicago has at least a few pairs. They are gradually increasing, and, as they are not only beautiful birds, but also wonderful singers, are more than welcome.

There are three irregular winter visitants which feed on the seeds of pine cones and, therefore, are most apt to be found in regions where conifers are plentiful. The first of these, the Pine Grosbeak, appears about every four or five years. At times it is very shy, difficult of approach and easily frightened, and again may be very tame and fearless. Besides pine seeds, it feeds on the fruits of various shrubs. The American and White-winged Crossbills occur a little more often than the Grosbeaks, the American being the more common of the two. When in flocks, they are very wild and hard to approach, but when only two or three are together, they can almost be caught in the hand. When feeding, which they do both upright or hanging head downward, they are quiet and difficult to see in the pines. The Newfoundland Crossbill, a subspecies of the American, has been taken here only once. The Crossbills are very erratic and many may be seen in a certain spot one day, and on the next, all will have gone. While primarily winterbirds, they have been found here in June and August.

Another species, occurring here intermittently, is the Bohemian Waxwing, which appears in large numbers during some years, generally about the last of November. On the 30th of this month, in 1919, a large flight of these birds was observed at Beach, Illinois. Flocks of fifty to a hundred passed overhead every five or ten minutes, from seven in the morning until noon, a few stopping to feed on the juniper berries. About fifteen hundred passed at that time and spread out over Chicago. Some twenty-five stayed about a moun-

tain-ash tree in Highland Park for a week, until they had eaten all the fruit. Many appeared in Jackson Park and they were found again in February in the Dunes. The Evening Grosbeak, supposedly an irregular winter visitant, has been found in the Dunes every winter for the past ten years by H. L. Stoddard. A few are seen elsewhere at other times, but not so commonly as in the Dunes. A common migrant, the Purple Finch, may be seen about in winter. It is an erratic bird, and no definite place could be named where it might be found regularly. Bronzed Grackles and Robins often pass the winter here, the former generally in the vicinity of some pine grove, and the latter in any protected spot where food can be secured. The "first Robins" are probably birds that have wintered here. Two of our most common winter birds frequent the entire area, the Blue Jay and Crow, although the Jay comes about houses more than the wary Crow.

To those interested in winter birds, a feeding shelf is a great help, as it brings some of the birds close to hand and gives a better opportunity for study. It may often save the lives of many birds when storms have covered the ground with deep snow or coated the trees with ice. Woodpeckers, sparrows, nuthatches, cardinals, jays, chickadees, titmice and occasionally others will patronize it. A feeding shelf is not only a pleasure to the one keeping it, but it is a great benefit to the birds, which certainly deserve some reward for their assistance in keeping in check the many insect pests which are so destructive to trees and shrubs. The Government has published a bulletin on the subject (Farmers' Bulletin, No. 912), which may be secured upon application to the Secretary of Agriculture.

COLIN C. SANBORN,
Assistant, Division of Birds.

CLASSIFIED LIST OF CHICAGO WINTER BIRDS

RESIDENTS

Herring Gull (<i>Larus argentatus</i>)	Northern Flicker (<i>Colaptes a. luteus</i>)
Ring-billed Gull (<i>Larus delawarensis</i>)	Prairie Horned Lark (<i>Otocoris a. praticola</i>)
Bob-white (<i>Colinus v. virginianus</i>)	Blue Jay (<i>Cyanocitta c. cristata</i>)
Ruffed Grouse (<i>Bonasa u. umbellus</i>)	Crow (<i>Corvus b. brachyrhynchos</i>)
Prairie Chicken (<i>Tympanuchus americanus</i>)	Meadowlark (<i>Sturnella m. magna</i>)
Marsh Hawk (<i>Circus hudsonius</i>)	Bronzed Grackle (<i>Quiscalus q. acneus</i>)
Sparrow Hawk (<i>Cerchneis s. sparveria</i>)	Goldfinch (<i>Astragalinus t. tristis</i>)
Long-eared Owl (<i>Asio wilsonianus</i>)	Song Sparrow (<i>Melospiza m. melodia</i>)
Screech Owl (<i>Otus a. naxvius</i>)	Cardinal (<i>Cardinalis c. cardinalis</i>)
Great-horned Owl (<i>Bubo v. virginianus</i>)	White-breasted Nuthatch (<i>Sitta c. carolinensis</i>)
Hairy Woodpecker (<i>Dryobates v. villosus</i>)	Tufted Titmouse (<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>)
Downy Woodpecker (<i>Dryobates p. medianus</i>)	Chickadee (<i>Penthestes a. atricapillus</i>)
Red-headed Woodpecker (<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>)	Robin (<i>Planesticus m. migratorius</i>)

COMMON WINTER VISITANTS

American Merganser (<i>Mergus americanus</i>)	Short-eared Owl (<i>Asio flammeus</i>)
Red-breasted Merganser (<i>Mergus serrator</i>)	Saw-whet Owl (<i>Cryptoglaux a. acadica</i>)
Golden-eye (<i>Glaucionetta c. americana</i>)	Redpoll (<i>Acanthis l. linaria</i>)
Old-squaw (<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>)	Pine Siskin (<i>Spinus pinus</i>)
Canada Goose (<i>Branta c. canadensis</i>)	Snow Bunting (<i>Plectrophenax n. nivalis</i>)
Rough-legged Hawk (<i>Archibuteo lagopus sancti-johannis</i>)	Tree Sparrow (<i>Spizella m. monticola</i>)

Slate-colored Junco
(*Junco h. hyemalis*)

Northern Shrike
(*Lanius borealis*)

IRREGULAR WINTER VISITANTS

Scoter
(*Oidemia americana*)

Evening Grosbeak
(*Hesperiphona v. vespertina*)

White-winged Scoter
(*Oidemia deglandi*)

Pine Grosbeak
(*Pinicola e. leucura*)

Surf Scoter
(*Oidemia perspicillata*)

Crossbill
(*Loxia c. minor*)

Goshawk
(*Astur a. atricapillus*)

White-winged Crossbill
(*Loxia leucoptera*)

Snowy Owl
(*Nyctea nyctea*)

Bohemian Waxwing
(*Bombycilla garrula*)

RARE WINTER VISITANTS

Barrow's Golden-eye
(*Glaucionetta islandica*)

Hoary Redpoll
(*Acanthis h. exilipes*)

Harlequin Duck
(*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

Holboell's Redpoll
(*Acanthis l. holboelli*)

Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker
(*Picoides arcticus*)

Hudsonian Chickadee
(*Penthestes h. hudsonicus*)

Newfoundland Crossbill
(*Loxia c. percna*)

MIGRANTS THAT SOMETIMES WINTER

Bonaparte's Gull
(*Larus philadelphia*)

Brown Creeper
(*Certhia f. americana*)

Purple Finch
(*Carpodacus p. purpureus*)

Red-breasted Nuthatch
(*Sitta canadensis*)

Fox Sparrow
(*Passerella i. iliaca*)

Golden-crowned Kinglet
(*Regulus s. satrapa*)

INTRODUCED RESIDENTS

English Sparrow
(*Passer domesticus*)

Hungarian Partridge
(*Perdix perdix*)

Ring-necked Pheasant
(*Phasianus colchicus*)

Winter birds are shown in the exhibits of the Field Museum in two habitat groups, in Hall 20. One of these represents the icy shore of Lake Michigan during cold weather, and shows three species of ducks, Old-squaws, Red-breasted Mergansers, and a Surf Scoter, and also adult and immature Herring Gulls. The other group represents a brushy woodland near Chicago, and shows the Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Screech Owl, Crow, Chickadee, Prairie Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, Blue Jay, Northern Shrike, and an English Sparrow and Redpoll which have been caught by the Shrike.



